

FEDERAL PROSECUTORS UNVEIL THE ASTONISHING INTRIGUES OF THE SCIENTOLOGY CHURCH

Since its founding by a science fiction writer named L. Ron Hubbard in 1954, Scientology has been among the growth stocks on the self-help market: a quasireligious, quasiscientific cult that has attracted three million U.S. followers (some highly touted celebrities among them) and estimated annual revenues in the hundreds of millions, much of it tax-exempt. Until recently Scientology's only certifiable vice was eccentricity, but within a week a federal grand jury in Washington is expected to hand down a bulging sheaf of indictments. They will charge some of the sect's highest officials with, among other things, burglary, obstruction of justice, wiretapping, harboring a fugitive and conspiracy. Federal grand juries already sitting in New York and Florida are considering other charges.

It all began, like Watergate, with an alert Washington guard—a night watchman at the U.S. Courthouse who became suspicious of two frequent after-hours visitors making liberal use of Xerox machines. They were copying what prosecutors now allege were an assistant U.S. attorney's files on Scientology suits against government agencies. The men had gained admittance with forged and borrowed IRS identification cards, but by the time the FBI had sorted out the case and issued arrest warrants, they had fled to the West Coast. At that point, prosecutors charge, an elaborate cover-up began in the Los Angeles office of Henning Heldt, Deputy Guardian of the Scientologists in the U.S.—and, as such, the head of the church in this country. A year later Michael Meisner, once the fifth highest Scientology official in the U.S., called Washington, confessed to being one of the late-night thieves and offered to turn state's evidence against other church elders. He said they had kept him under house arrest, gagged and handcuffed him, and repeatedly and aggressively "audited" him (the church's word for counseling).

The tale Meisner told was a chilling narrative of the church's attempts—through harassment, intimidation, infiltration and other forms of espionage—to gain advantage in numerous lawsuits against individuals and government agencies involving millions of dollars. On the basis of his story, more than 150 FBI agents armed with search warrants and crowbars raided Scientology headquarters in Washington and Los Angeles July 8, 1977. After 23 hours they left with an astounding haul, including lock picks, pistols, ammunition, knockout drops, a blackjack, bugging and wiretapping equipment, even a small vial labeled "vampire blood." They found documents apparently taken from the private files of federal prosecutors, correspondence between U.S. Cabinet members, and church memoranda on producing false identification papers, tailing people, laundering money and committing blackmail. Among the 23,000 documents the FBI impounded were files presumably snatched—either by employees or burglars who were Scientologists—from the Federal Trade and Atomic Energy Commissions; the National Security, Defense Intelligence and Central Intelligence Agencies; the Departments of Labor, the Army and the Navy; the U.S. Customs Service; Interpol, and numerous U.S. police departments.

When asked about this prodigious cache, Guardian Henning Heldt retreats into evasive martyrdom. "I think the issues are larger than what was in the inventory," he says. "There is the big issue of why the government has been trying to wipe out a church for 20 years."

The government charges that the Scientologists had more in mind than self-defense, that the raid turned up evidence of a "policy aimed at the elimination of individuals who were enemies of the church"—and one hatched as early as 1974 in the innermost sanctum of worldwide Scientology. The church is now said to be run by Mary Sue Hubbard (husband L. Ron has ostensibly retired) from a 57-acre estate in East Grinstead, Sussex, England (and once from a fleet of church-owned ships at sea). But it fell to an elite few of the church's 214 ruling "guardians" in the U.S. to carry out the alleged operation—and to Heldt, as chief U.S. Guardian, to supervise it.

Many of its apparent targets were critics of Scientology with no connection to government agencies involved in lawsuits with the church. Several "enemies lists" were found among the seized documents (containing such names as Sen. Edward Kennedy and Judge John Sirica), as well as hundreds of dossiers on "suppressives," church jargon for critics. These included broadcasters, writers and publishers of critical observations on Scientology, as well as the American Medical Association (whom they allegedly infiltrated with an agent code-named "Sore Throat"), Better Business Bureaus, several foundations and law firms and dozens of politicians. The documents suggest that the church resorted to harassment, intimidation and outright defamation of several individuals—and U.S. Attorney Raymond Banoun, who will prosecute the case in Washington, counts himself among them. "Numerous people have posed as government investigators," he says, "trying to find out my personal habits and background. That's happened all over my neighborhood. My car also caught fire recently. [U.S. Attorney] Earl Silbert has ordered an investigation of that."

Perhaps no critic of the church has suf-

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ferred more than New York free-lance writer Paulette Cooper, author of a 1971 book titled *The Scandal of Scientology*—and the target of a church operation code-named "PC Freak Out." Her publisher withdrew *Scandal* and destroyed most copies almost as soon as it was printed—in the face of defamation suits in five countries seeking \$15 million damages. But, according to a suit Cooper plans to file after the federal indictments are announced, the church continued for years afterward to press a smear campaign bent on putting her "in a mental institution [or] in jail." To that end, she charges, church members followed her, stole her diary, threatened her with a gun, lifted files from her psychiatrist and her lawyer, wrote anonymous "Dear Fellow Tenant" letters saying she was a sexual deviant with venereal disease—and framed her on federal charges of making bomb threats against the church. (They wrote the threats to themselves on her stationery, which they had stolen.) Charges were eventually dropped when she passed a seven-hour sodium pentothal test, but she had to spend \$28,000 to defend herself and \$4,000 on psychotherapy to cope with the stress. "At one point I was down to 83 pounds," she remembers. The recently seized church documents may well support her latest suit against the church—for \$40 million in damages—but she still lives like a fugitive, using the service elevator in her New York apartment and wearing dark glasses and disguises.

Gabriel Cazares, the former mayor of Clearwater, Fla., believes he has been another target of church harassment. Cazares began to speak out against Scientology when the sect bought a hotel and a bank building in his town to house its new International advanced training center. "They lied about their purpose in being here," he says, "disclaiming that they had any connection with Scientology." To discredit him, he charges, Scientologists circulated petitions for his resignation, sent members disguised as reporters to his Texas hometown to look into his past, spread implications that he was born out of wedlock and finally circulated an anonymous letter accusing him of involvement in a hit-and-run accident. The church filed two suits against him in 1978 seeking \$3 million in damages. Three weeks ago a Florida judge dismissed one as "without basis" and the other has been

withdrawn. Cazares and his wife, however, are planning to institute two countersuits. "We've got a good case," he says. "When the dust settles, it will be clear that we had in our midst an organization that was involved in a political movement, an action so bizarre that it's difficult to believe. The nature of this cult is ruthless."

Deputy Guardian Henning Heldt, 33, a Cornell graduate and once an aspiring artist, is the man prosecutors say was responsible for directing the church's covert operations in the U.S. Heldt will not comment on specific charges. "As part of fighting a criminal case, one should keep his cards close to his chest until you get to the table," he says. He describes his church responsibility as "social reform and rehabilitation." He is also the overseer of all 2,795 U.S. staff members, supervisor of the 38 American churches and line custodian of the revenues collected in this country. A self-described hard-nosed businessman, he is happy to say business is good. "The church's secret," he says, "is: one, don't spend more than you take in; and two, deliver what you promise—and in a volume necessary to stay solvent." Legal fees for the California church alone doubled last year (to \$1 million) and may well double again, but Heldt says that is just the price of doing business. "The legal costs act as an unlegislated tax," he says, "a tax you've got to pay to keep going."

In the face of his own serious legal problems, Heldt is remarkably, almost eerily, calm. "You know," he says, "the guys who have done the most are the ones who have taken the most heat—Martin Luther King and so on." He lives handsomely but quietly in the Hollywood Hills with his wife, Mary, 32, and their daughter, Letty, 9. He explains away two karate and judo experts who live downstairs as roomers, but will admit to other precautions. "I don't put anything in letters," Heldt says, "and I'm relatively certain that our phones have been tapped. We spend thou-

sands and thousands of dollars for people to sweep our phones [for bugs], but there are no guarantees."

Otherwise, he says, life goes on very much as before: He does wood sculpture in the garage, jogs weekends with Mary (she does two miles to his six) and usually works 12-hour days for the church. Mary is also an official, bringing home a little less than Heldt's reported \$8,500 a year. Every day each parent spends an hour with Letty "doing whatever she wants within reason," as Mary Heldt puts it. The child is working her way toward a level of understanding of church philosophy called "clear," but, she says, "I'm in the middle of a drug rundown now." It is an attempt, her mother explains, to determine how drugs she took for an operation affected her thinking.

Heldt's official response to government charges is an all-out, if vague, counteroffensive. "We're in the business of reforming political corruption," he says. "The government is worried about having its secrets published. We feel a very major issue is the people's right to know and the right to do something about it." He cites the church's extensive use of the Freedom of Information Act to pry loose some government documents legally and the enterprise of the church newspaper, *Freedom*, which he says has unearthed others—"and they're not saying where." Heldt will admit only to being tough—not wrong. "We've stepped on lots of people's toes," as Mary puts it. "Because we are effective, we may appear to be a threat."

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